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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KJUS](#) [PTER](#) [CO](#)  
SUBJECT: MEETING WITH POLO PRESIDENTIAL NOMINEE CARLOS  
GAVIRIA

REF: BOGOTA 3258

Classified By: Ambassador William B. Wood, Reasons: 1.4B & D.

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Summary  
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¶1. (C) In a breakfast with poloffs on April 10, Alternative Democratic Pole (PDA, or Polo) Presidential nominee Carlos Gaviria Diaz acknowledged that President Uribe would be reelected, although perhaps not on the first ballot. Gaviria's short term goal is to push Liberal (PLC) nominee Horacio Serpa into third place and position the Polo for the 2010 presidential race. Gaviria said Serpa's campaign is fading and he could overtake him. With regard to the FARC, Gaviria said the terrorist group wants to "take power" and he was adamant that no armed group would take power under a Gaviria administration. Gaviria said the FARC must be combated on the battlefield, but "state presence" in rural areas must include health, education, and social service projects in addition to security forces. While Gaviria was not optimistic about the prospects for peace with the FARC, he said the GOC-ELN peace process was moving forward and might prove successful. Gaviria argued that paramilitary influence in the Congress had not changed much since the March 12 elections. He predicted that Congress would approve the Free Trade Agreement, and that the Constitutional Court would avoid addressing the substance of the Justice and Peace law by sending it back to the Congress on procedural grounds.

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Uribe Reelected; Polo's Short Term Opponent is Serpa  
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¶2. (C) Gaviria said Uribe would be reelected, but perhaps not on the first ballot. Gaviria's immediate goal is to boost the Polo's presence in Colombia and demonstrate to the electorate that the democratic left can be trusted with security issues. He said guerrilla violence had tainted the democratic left and made it harder for them to gain the peoples' trust. Gaviria said he will not run in 2010; rather, he wanted to position the Polo to fight a campaign in 2010 as the principal opposition on the left. To do that, the Polo had to push the Liberals into third place in May. Gaviria said the Serpa campaign was fading and the Polo campaign was cutting into Serpa's support. Gaviria hoped for about 2.5 million votes, which he said might be enough to run

second to Uribe. In response to a question, Gaviria said the Polo's 2010 campaign would be more credible if led by a governor or mayor who had a solid record of delivering services.

13. (C) According to Gaviria, the Polo is being careful with its resources, using veteran politicians and consultants to target voter outreach efforts to areas most likely to prove fruitful. Gaviria explained that he selected Patricia Lara as his vice presidential running mate because she had integrity, no political baggage, and was a woman. (All three of his top choices were women: his first choice, the author Laura Restrepo, declined because of publishing commitments, and another leading candidate, Maria Teresa Uribe, a Medellin sociologist, declined for health reasons.)

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FARC Wants to Take Power  
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14. (C) Gaviria said the FARC retains a significant political/ideological perspective ("they are Stalinists") and wants to take power in Colombia. A peace process with the FARC was far off, in his view. Narcotics trafficking is primarily a means to finance the organization, he said. Gaviria elaborated on recent interviews he has given on this subject, saying that no armed group would take power under a Gaviria administration. He emphasized that he was personally committed to showing that democratic politics was the only viable option for Colombia. In that context, he said the Colombian military must continue to battle the FARC in the field. Gaviria argued, however, that the "state presence" in rural areas was largely limited to the military and police, which he said was insufficient to address serious rural needs

on health, education, and other social services. Without a greater and more sustained GOC attention to social issues in rural areas, he claimed, campesinos would continue to support or tolerate the FARC. According to Gaviria, the best way to combat the FARC would be to take away their (limited) social base of support by giving campesinos more services.

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GOC-ELN Process on Track  
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15. (C) In contrast to Gaviria's pessimism on the likelihood of a FARC peace process, he said the GOC-ELN peace process looks on track and had a chance of success. In Gaviria's view, the ELN has more educated leaders who are even "God fearing." It is more in touch with reality than the FARC, whose leaders (with the exception of Alfredo Cano) were humble farmers out of touch with Colombian reality.

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Paramilitaries  
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16. (C) Gaviria argued that AUC influence in the Congress had not declined as a result of March 12 Congressional elections.

In his view, the AUC let some of its more blatantly obvious supporters flounder, while financially backing numerous candidates behind-the-scenes. He said AUC money had entered the campaigns of members of all the leading parties. (See

reftel for Embassy views on evolving AUC influence.) Gaviria was highly critical of Congress as an institution, saying most members paid little attention to legislative business.

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Free Trade and Justice and Peace  
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17. (C) Gaviria predicted that the Congress would easily approve the Free Trade Agreement. A former head of the Constitutional Court, he repeated his prediction that the court would strike down the Justice and Peace Law and send it back to the Congress for revision. He said the court would

likely limit its ruling to procedural irregularities,  
sidestepping substantive review.

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Comment  
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¶8. (C) Gaviria is an eloquent, affable interlocutor, with little chance of defeating Uribe. Since neither party has a chance of defeating Uribe, Gaviria may have a chance of finishing second on May 28. In some polling he is running ahead of the lackluster Serpa, although the Liberal Party machinery remains a potent force on election day. As the campaign picks up steam, the Polo's results might fade.  
WOOD